

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: MARCH 19, 2004

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: PHILIP SUNDERLAND, CITY MANAGER

SUBJECT: REPORT ON THE 2003 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING THE 2004 FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS

ISSUE: Report on the 2003 Festival of the Arts and Recommendations Concerning the 2004 Festival of the Arts

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council:

- (1) Approve continuing the Fall Festival of the Arts in 2004 with it becoming an annual event;
- (2) Set the 2004 date for the two-day festival as Saturday, September 11 and Sunday, September 12; and
- (3) Acknowledge that the Arts Festival Committee will serve as the sponsor of the event in 2004.

BACKGROUND: The City's first Fall Festival of the Arts was held on September 13 and 14, 2003, along King Street between Union Street and St. Asaph Street. Five blocks of King Street and the 100 blocks of North and South Pitt, Royal, Fairfax and Lee Streets were closed during the festival hours (10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) to accommodate the exhibits that were placed along King Street. Over 175 artists from throughout the nation displayed and sold art including paintings, sculpture, prints, photographs, pottery, glass and jewelry. The Alexandria Convention and Visitors Association (ACVA) hired an arts festival promoter who selected the artists, and worked with ACVA to produce and organize the event. The City was a co-sponsor. While it is difficult to estimate attendees over a multi-day festival such as this, we estimate that between 15,000 and 25,000 people attended the Festival. The Festival attendees included City residents, Washington, D.C. metropolitan area residents, and many persons from outside this region who traveled to Alexandria for the primary purpose of attending the Arts Festival. Some of these were day trippers and some stayed in City hotels.

DISCUSSION: The Fall Festival of the Arts was initiated as a way of promoting the City as an arts and cultural venue, and as a way to encourage tourists and metropolitan area residents to visit Old Town to shop and dine either during the Festival, immediately after it closed, or to return to

Old Town at later dates to shop and dine. The Festival was perceived as a needed boost to Old Town merchants and restaurateurs, many of whom have had declining revenues over the last two years because of the impact of September 11, the temporary closing of National Airport, the anthrax scares, the sniper incident and the heightened terrorism concerns in this region which have depressed tourism over the past two years. Increased competition with other renewed or new downtown areas in this region such as Shirlington, Clarendon, Old Town Manassas, Pentagon Row, Bethesda, Reston Town Center and many areas of the District of Columbia have also created direct competition for local consumer retail and dining dollars.

In the fall of 2002, when Council approved having the Arts Festival in September 2003, Council requested that staff bring back an evaluation of the 2003 Festival and recommendations concerning whether or not to have the Festival on a continuing basis in 2004 and beyond.

ACVA worked with the staff on the City's Special Events Committee (the City was a co-sponsor) to work out the complicated logistics and plans for the Festival. Given this entailed planning for the unprecedented closing of five blocks of King Street for nearly two days while drawing in thousands of attendees, this represented a challenging task for both ACVA and the City staff. However, it was also a learning experience which gave all parties valuable lessons for the future.

With regard to a general impression about the Festival, it appears that, while not an unanimous opinion, the Festival was well received by the visitors, residents, businesses, artist exhibitors, the Old Town Business Association, the Old Town Civic Association, as well as many other arts and business groups in the City. Many of these groups and individuals have comments and suggestions related to improving the Festival. The exhibiting artists, who exhibit at many other arts festivals, were pleased with the size of the crowd, its artistic knowledge, as well as the dollar volume of art sales.

Subsequent to the Festival, the City's Special Events Committee, ACVA, Old Town Business Association, Old Town Civic Association, the Arts Commission and various arts groups all held discussions and meetings to discuss the 2003 Festival and to discuss whether or not it should be held in 2004, and, if so, how the Festival could be improved.

Councilmen Krupicka and Smedberg, along with Arts Commission Chair Leon Scioscia, then facilitated a series of community meetings and discussions among the interested parties, including the Arts Commission, in regard to planning for a 2004 Festival of the Arts. The result of those discussions are that:

1. The 2004 Festival of the Arts would be managed by an Arts Festival Committee to be created by the Arts Commission.
2. The Arts Festival Committee would be chaired by the Arts Commission Chair Leon Scioscia.

3. There would be three vice-chairs: Joanne Mitchell of ACVA, Janet Barnett of the Department of Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities who has oversight responsibilities for the City staff Special Events Committee, and a to-be-named person from the artistic community. The three co-chairs represent the three key areas of marketing and promotion, logistics, and the arts.
4. The intent, which may take years to fully implement, is to create an inclusive City-wide festival which encompasses the visual arts, the performing arts and an educational component. This would stretch the event to more than a one-week period with the goal of having the Arts on the Avenue and the Arts Festival serve as "bookends" to this City-wide arts celebration.
5. As time is a critical issue to planning and executing an event for this fall's Festival, the Chair of the Arts Commission and the two existing vice-chairs of the Arts Festival Committee were given the responsibility for promoter interviews and selection.
6. A sub-committee to the Arts Festival Committee, in cooperation with the City and the City Council representatives, will be created in the near term to actively formulate plans for the 2005 Festival, which will include evaluating the best organizational structure to ensure the long term success of the Arts Festival.

The proposed dates for the fall 2004 Festival do not require Council granting an exception to the Major Events Guidelines which allow major events to be held in Old Town (east of Washington Street) only on every other weekend. Therefore, staff does not anticipate seeking an exception to the Major Events Policy for the Festival. However, because of the date which ACVA chose for the Festival, the Chili Cook-off will need to be moved to the next weekend and, as a result, will require a Major Events exception, which staff will be recommending.

FISCAL IMPACT: The Festival costs in 2003 to the City were about \$25,000, with the promoter reimbursing the City for \$16,000 of the City's costs. The City's share was then about \$9,000. For 2004 the costs and City share will need to be negotiated with the promoter. The FY 2005 Proposed Budget includes a \$25,000 placeholder amount for City support of the 2004 Arts Festival.

The direct tax revenue benefits to the City are positive from the Arts Festival but are difficult to measure. However, it is clear that the 15,000 to 25,000 attendees made not only purchases from the artists (where sales taxes were paid), but also purchased goods in retail shops, purchased art in the City's galleries, as well as purchased food and beverages in the City's restaurants. Volume of sales was reported by many merchants to be higher, particularly among the merchants who promoted their businesses during the Festival (special events, free food samples, sidewalk displays, etc.).

STAFF:

Mark Jinks, Assistant City Manager

Janet Barnett, Deputy Director, Recreation, Parks and Cultural Activities